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ABSTRACT

Classroom teachers of adolescents need to analyze the material they use for instructional purposes, as well as the materials they suggest for independent reading, to be certain that both incorporate text which is informational or technical, since experience suggests that this type of material is generally preferred by readers of this age group. Examples of the kind of text which can be used with adolescents include a substantial variety of genres. An appropriate starting point for reluctant readers is biographies, some of which have more of a documentary tone while others read more like novels. Material drawn from the adult world is also informative and appealing to young adults. Pamphlets and brochures supply practical information on such topics as wages, driving, word processing, interviewing, etc. These lend themselves for use with remedial readers while being presented in an adult format. Other sources for factual and motivational reading material include newspapers, magazines, and texts containing scientific or educational information. The justification for incorporating such materials in the classroom is that they provide reluctant readers with the needed motivation and help satisfy the need of adolescents to develop their self-concepts. (KEH)

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Using Informational Materials to Spark Reading Interests in Adolescents

It has been said that the only predictable aspect of adolescents is their unpredictability. Anyone who has worked with this age group quickly becomes accustomed not only to the wide variance of emotional reactions each student is capable of producing, but also to the great variety of reading interests which exist in a given classroom.

Reading teachers of this age group face a particularly fearful task; we must suggest reading material for this population. While the students cling tenaciously to their often narrow interests, our goal includes broadening their appreciation. While they may appear to only appreciate that which their peers are reading, we remember our numerous objectives for their reading growth. Yet suggest material we must, for in many cases the reading material will be instrumental in affecting their reading abilities.

We must also come armed with two facts. One is that many readers prefer informational or technical text as opposed to literature. The other is really a set of interrelated ideas stressing the importance of including this area of interest in our instruction of adolescents.

Beginning with the first idea, classroom teachers need to analyze the material they use for instructional purposes, as well

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as the material they suggest for independent reading, to be certain that both incorporate text which is informational or technical. This is defined as text which has at least some of the following characteristics:

Concern with factual matters which are quite often technical

Use of a predictable vocabulary and conventional report form

Commitment to objectivity and accuracy

A conservative nature, namely the subject-verb-object order

The author's attitude of seriousness

Dedication to the facts

A complexity, which involves descriptions, classifications, and often more intricate problems

Examples of this kind of text which can be used with adolescents include a substantial variety. Biography is often appealing to this age group and should not be overlooked. Some are written with more of a documentary tone, and others read as a novel. Paul Harvey has published various versions of The Rest of the Story, which contain short pieces. Text such as this is often an appropriate starting point for reluctant readers. There are also many sports heros and other popular stars whose lives have been chronicled and many of these can be found in anthologies.

Material can also be drawn from the adult world. Information on tax preparation, salaries, and wages can have a great appeal to young adults. The driver's guide has often served as a great motivator toward learning to read. Directions

for using a word processor or computer, pamphlets on pet care, brochures on home safety, hygiene and sex education, automobile maintenance and repair, and information about applying and interviewing for a job can all be incorporated into a reading program. Most of this information not only is of interest to the adolescent, it is written at a level which lends itself for use with remedial readers while being presented in an adult format. Supplementary material, including worksheets and workbooks, is also available from companies producing materials for special education students.

Newspapers and magazines can be motivational to adolescents and many contain factual articles. Norvell (1966) explored the popularity of magazines with 6000 students. He found that students demonstrated an early preference for adult magazines, and seven of the ten magazines most popular with the children in his study were considered adult magazines. Newspaper readership increases with age until about age 17. Readership is influenced by availability, as well as teachers requiring students to read newspapers in their classes (Harris and Sipay, 1984). Junior and seniors in high school have reported a strong interest in reading the newspaper (Elliott and Steinkellner, 1979).

The last group of factual material would include text of a scientific or educational nature, which although may sound boring, is often interesting to most individuals. This would include textbooks (perhaps written at a lower reading level than the student's actual grade level) in the areas of physical

science, geography, world cultures, astronomy and geology. National Geographic, as well as other companies, often produces text rich in information and detail, yet written at a moderately elementary level.

If teachers tend to shy away from using informational reading with remedial readers, they should not, for some of these readers will find this type of text particularly rewarding. As mentioned earlier, the personal interest of the reader in the text is important at all levels but vital with the adolescent. One feature we often see with an at-risk group is the simple refusal to do that which does not interest them. On just this idea alone, we can see justification for incorporating a wide variety of material in our classrooms so that it includes factual information on the subjects many adolescents find interesting.

Beyond this are many other facts that add to the rationale for using more technical types of material in the classroom. The satisfying of psychological needs is one of the major determinants of a reader's preferences (Harris and Sipay, 1984), and the need to develop self-concept, of predominant importance to the adolescent, may be addressed by the use of informational text.

Students may be pleasantly surprised to find that their background of experience on a given subject has produced a sound foundation in the concepts and vocabulary necessary for them to understand the reading. The poor reader who is also an expert on automobiles will often experience good comprehension with text on

this subject, even though it might be written at a fairly difficult level. It may be a reinforcing experience for them to discover that they are able to read a fairly technical test, often one more difficult than they would have thought they could read.

The student also has intellectual needs. "...More interesting, however, is the fact that a very great deal of human mentation, at all developmental levels, is intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated, that is, the cognitive system is often turned on and kept running by purely cognitive factors, rather than by bodily needs or motivational sources" (Flavell, 1977). It is fun, and therefore motivating to learn. Although we learn a great deal through literature, it is often easier to see tangible proof of our learning when it deals with the concrete and the factual. Informational materials may produce the "... system of motivation inherent in information processing and action" (Busse and Mansfield, 1976).

Finally comes the justification that in 1985, just five percent of students at age 17 were estimated to have the reading skills and strategies that enable them to synthesize and restructure ideas presented in specialized texts (U.S. Department of Education, 1985). Considering this statistic, we must continue to address this concern by presenting informational materials with all readers and at all levels. The understanding of specialized texts begins with classroom instruction promoting reading experiences using informational text.

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